

A School Without Walls

Strategic Plan

Submitted to :

Ms. Carmen Grove Suminski, Superintendent

and

The North Dakota School for the Deaf,

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By:

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Executive Summary

The Strategic Planning Goal

To develop an Action Plan to begin to implement the outreach recommendations of the Future Services Plan and, through the mission, of the North Dakota School for the Deaf provide services to more deaf and hard of hearing children, students and adults in the state.

The Facilitator

Michael J Bello is the Executive Director Emeritus of The Learning Center for the Deaf in Framingham Massachusetts. Bello recently retired (2010) as President and Executive Director of The Learning Center for the Deaf. He had been the school's Head for 15 years and served as the Associate Executive Director for the 14 years prior to that. In total, Bello has 42 years of experience in the education of the deaf and hard of hearing. His experience has been with both schools for the deaf and with inclusion programs for deaf and hard of hearing students. He has extensive strategic planning background and has served as a strategic planning consultant for several years. He was a long time board member of the Conference of Executives of American Schools and Programs for the Deaf (CEASD) and has national experience and knowledge of the issues in educating deaf and hard of hearing children.

The Learning Center for the Deaf is a state supported private school for deaf and hard of hearing children. The school has both a residential and day school component. It currently enrolls over 200 students on campus and serves another 150 public school, mainstream deaf students through its outreach program. The school also is an early intervention specialty provider to deaf infants/toddlers and their families throughout the state. The school is also the state wraparound program provider to a significant number of deaf students with emotional difficulties. The Learning Center has become one of the largest schools for the deaf in the Northeast United States.

The Strategic Planning Team

The following individuals participated in the strategic planning process.

Carmen Grove Suminski, Superintendent NDSD

Dr Gary Gronberg, NDDPI Liaison- representing Dr. Sanstead

Nancy Skorheim, Coordinator, NDDPI

Deborah Johnsen, Coordinator of Student Programs, Vision Services for the

Blind

Carol Lybeck, Outreach Coordinator, NDSD

Nicole Swartwout, Parent Infant/Outreach NDSD

Linda Ehlers, Parent Infant/Outreach NDSD

Pam Smith, Coordinator of Adult Services

Renae Bitner, Interpreter, Communications Dept, NDSD

Denise Marback, Outreach NDSD

Sherri Nelson, North Dakota Dual Sensory Project

Tami Iszler, Outreach NDSD

Lindsay McCloud Outreach, NDSD

*David Zimmerman, NDSD Teacher (participated the second day)

*Duane Knutson, NDSD Custodian (participated the second day)

*Senator David Oehlke, ND legislator (participated during the first day)

*Holly Pederson, Minot State University (telephone meeting with the facilitator)

*Connie Hovendick, Lake Region SPED Unit (participated during the first day)

*Mike Bower, President, Lake Region State College (met with facilitator after the planning sessions)

* Bob Rutten, NDDPI (telephone meeting with the facilitator)

- Indicates that the person did not participate for the full meeting time.

Materials Reviewed for the Strategic Plan Process

In preparation for the planning sessions the following documents were reviewed and referenced by the planning team:

- The 2006 North Dakota School for the Deaf Strategic Plan (November 21, 2006)
- The North Dakota School for the Deaf Outreach Strategic Plan for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students (August 2008)
- The report on Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) by the National Center on Severe and Sensory Disabilities (August 18, 2008)
- North Dakota School for the Deaf – Future Services Plan -Transition Team recommendations
- The document entitled Activities Grid (sent to Dr. Sanstead by you on September 13, 2011)
- North Dakota School for the Deaf /State Center of Excellence Outline and Description
- The Current North Dakota School for the Deaf/State Center Mission Statement
- The North Dakota Student Count Data
- The North Dakota Century Code Chapter 25-07- Education Of Deaf Persons

Background Information

* Information was collected through review of the materials listed above, brainstorming sessions with the strategic plan participants and interviews with the other informants.

Ms. Carmen Grove Suminski, North Dakota School for the Deaf Superintendent, contacted the facilitator to assist her and her faculty to implement the recommendations and conclusions of the Future Services Plan, which had been developed by the Consensus Council, Inc. and 13 planners, collectively known as The Transition Team, in 2009-2010. The resulting product known as The Future Services Plan (FSP) documented a set of conclusions and recommendations, which were prepared for the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction (NDDPI) and presented to the North Dakota Legislature in the last session. Ms. Suminski was particularly interested in developing a plan to implement the FSP recommendations that related to outreach activities.

After reading The Future Services Plan, the facilitator questioned Ms. Suminski and the team regarding the need for more strategic planning since the Plan's recommendations reflected "state of the art" policy and procedures for serving deaf and hard of hearing infants, students and adults in a low incidence, rural state setting. Ms. Suminski explained that the Plan had received strong criticism from some key legislators and that the NDDPI had decided that they could not move forward with The Future Services Plan at this time.

The FSP clearly recognized the need for a residential and day school for the deaf option as an important piece of the federally mandated continuum of services. Additionally it is important to cite the August 18, 2008 work of The National Center on Severe Disabilities entitled Consideration in Providing a Free, Appropriate Public Education to Students who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing in North Dakota. This report, which was commissioned by The North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, emphasized the need for the full continuum of services and rightly cited IDEA 2004 which notes, that IEP teams must consider, *"the communication needs of the of the child and in the case of the deaf and hard of hearing child consider the language and communication needs, opportunities for direct communications with peers and professional personnel in the child's language and communication mode, academic level and full range of need, including opportunities for direct instruction in the child's language and communication mode."* In addition, The Conference of Educational Administrators of Schools and Programs for the Deaf recognizes the unique language and communication needs of children who are deaf and hard of hearing and the need for the full continuum of service options to meet FAPE in its IDEA-Child Campaign.

While correctly recognizing the role of the school for the deaf, the FSP also recognized the changing nature of the education of the deaf in North Dakota and presented a new vision for services that was not "business as usual" but more forward looking than the provision of the school for the deaf as the only option. The FSP stated that NDSB needed to serve a wide variety of deaf and hard of hearing citizens, from birth through adulthood in the areas of the state where they resided. Thus the product of the work entitled The North Dakota School for the Deaf /State Center for Excellence emphasized outreach concepts. Through the State Center for Excellence (a name ultimately rejected by the legislature and the NDDPI) the school would employ a variety of regionalized services to meet needs in each area of the state. It is in this area of Outreach that the strategic planning team devoted its efforts.

During the initial planning session the planning team, in particular Dr. Gronberg and Ms. Suminski, explained that the legislators' criticism appeared to be that they did not see enough objective data to show that the NDSB intended to move in a new direction. Ms. Suminski explained that she and her staff were committed to the FSP concepts. These concepts, however, needed to be implemented in an action plan to demonstrate that the NDSB was committed to statewide outreach services and the other recommendations. Dr Gronberg added that the legislators were interested in specific measurable data that showed movement in the new direction.

The strategic planning team repeatedly indicated that more planning was necessary to educate local school districts, regional special education districts and the legislature of the critical service needs of deaf and hard of hearing students and to make them aware of the availability of high quality services provided by the school's outreach department specialists. It is not atypical for people unfamiliar with the underlying complexity that hearing loss poses to students in group situations like the classroom. The hard of hearing student, who understands well conversation in one to one quiet settings, may be completely confused in classroom noisy environments even with state of the art technology. The participants stated that throughout North Dakota there were appropriately placed hard of hearing students who were "slipping under the radar" without professional evaluation and support service recommendations.

The team wanted to work on a strategy to increase the number of deaf and hard of hearing infants, toddlers, school aged children and adults served by the school's outreach specialists. The participants also indicated that there was a need for better data collection to record the quantity and quality of the services that the school for the deaf team already provides and will provide in the future.

The facilitator asked the team, "How do you find out where the deaf and hard of hearing babies and students are?" The planning team reported that there isn't a mandatory newborn identification screening law in North Dakota. There is, however, voluntary compliance by birthing hospitals and the NDSD outreach team personnel are involved in an advisory capacity to the EDHHI process. As a result of that involvement, The NDSD outreach/PIP specialists currently serve 31 children and families in the Parent Infant Program. Given the demographics of North Dakota, 31 children between birth and 3 years of age appear to be a significant number. However, it does not represent all of the children who are in need of the quality services delivered by the Parent Infant Program specialist. It was noted that the new strategy should include a continued emphasis on awareness. We should work to help parents and professionals in the early intervention system become aware of the NDSD PIP specialists' availability and thereby increase the number of babies and families served.

The system is different for school aged children. Despite the North Dakota Century Code section, 25-07-10 that mandates a "Duty to Report" to the school for the deaf, there has been no voluntary nor mandated reporting of individuals who enter the schools. It was further reported that this statute is not being enforced. Interviews and discussion confirmed that there are deaf and hard of hearing students not being served and others who may be underserved throughout the state. The outreach team at NDSD is faced with a difficult conundrum. On the one hand, they are being criticized for not serving enough students through new methods to thereby reduce the per student costs to the state. On the other hand, they are not being told where deaf and hard of hearing students are by some gatekeepers.

The planning team is aware that there may be suspicions that the outreach team may have an ulterior motivation to "recruit" deaf students to the Devils' Lake Campus. The team also mentioned that there might be a perception that the team does not possess knowledge of current "best practices" in the education of the deaf and hard of hearing. These are 2 misconceptions that the team hopes the new strategy can work to dispel.

Improving statewide awareness of the statute in the Century Code, that requires notification, would be an important step toward increasing the number of students eligible to be served by NDSD through the outreach services. It would also ensure that deaf and hard of hearing students are being properly evaluated and that appropriate services are being recommended by the professionals in deaf and hard of hearing education. Where necessary, it seems imperative that NDDPI should partner with NDSD by enforcing the statute to assure that NDSD team does not remain in a "Catch-22" situation.

It should be further noted that a quality reporting system would be strategically critical in helping NDSD to meet its mission and to expand its scope of service to all deaf and hard of hearing individuals. States that utilize the school for the deaf as a "single point of entry" registry are often the states that provide the most comprehensive system of education for deaf and hard of hearing students. Single point of entry states can best determine, through on-going quality data collection, how well their deaf citizens are being served throughout their life span. The planning team wants to work on helping all professionals in the educational and medical system become aware of the mandatory reporting statute in the Century Code.

Another area of concern for the team centered on the availability and quality of educational interpreting services in the state. The planning team noted that there is a ND law that requires interpreters to pass the EIPA at the 3.5 level before working in the classroom. The team further noted that, once again, there was no system to ensure compliance. Questions arose about on-going professional development and support for the isolated interpreters. The team asked, what happens if the lone interpreter in a system is sick?

With the partnership between Lake Region College's interpreter training program, which is housed at NDSD, and the NDSD communication department, the planning team was confident that quality educational interpreting could be assured for North Dakota's deaf students. Interpreting was identified as a strategic area that needed to be included in the plan.

The planning team recognized that the task of locating deaf and hard of hearing adults who are in need of services and then providing for the needed service was an overwhelming responsibility for the lone Coordinator of Adult Services. Therefore prioritization would be the primary goal of the adult services strategy. The strategic plan should focus on the best way for the Coordinator of adult services to locate persons in need of service. The plan should provide for documentation of unfilled needs in the adult deaf, late deafened, and hard of hearing community. The plan should also lead toward the building of partnerships with existing adult service agencies.

In conclusion, the strategic planning team decided that the primary strategy for the Action Plan should be centered on developing a framework that demonstrates that NDSD has the intention and ability to expand its services to deaf and hard of hearing persons beyond the walls of the NDSD campus. The team specifically wants to demonstrate, through data, the quantity and quality of services that are already being provided to deaf and hard of hearing children and students of North Dakota. The team further wants to educate all stakeholders and gatekeepers that deaf and hard of hearing persons who are not served or who may be underserved are at serious risk. The team also wants to help make

stakeholders aware of the breadth and quality of services that NDSD can provide through their outreach efforts. The team also wants to serve as a registry for all deaf and hard of hearing children, students and ultimately adults.

The time period to be covered by the strategic plan would be 18 months. The team was aware that all of the recommendations of the Future services Plan could not be implemented in this period of time but they were more interested in demonstrating significant immediate progress in the direction that the FSP envisioned.

Finally, the team asked that we brainstorm ideas for a new name of the North Dakota School for the Deaf /State Center of Excellence. It was noted that the legislature objected to the State Center of Excellence portion.

Specific focus areas for strategic planning

1. Ensure that NDSD is notified of Deaf and Hard of Hearing persons as they enter the system.
2. Educate all stakeholders of the fact that deaf and hard of hearing persons are at risk.
3. Fill the gaps in the service delivery system for infants, families, students and adults.
4. Ensure that only highly qualified interpreters deliver educational interpreting.
5. Develop a system to prioritize the efforts of the Coordinator of Adult Services.
6. Improve stakeholder awareness of the availability of and the high quality of services provided by the outreach team at NDSD.
7. Expand outreach services by increasing the number of persons being served and by developing a concept of "a school without walls".
8. Build trust with LEAS and Special Education Districts - Erase any perceived ideas that NDSD provides services to LEAs for the sole purpose of recruitment to NDSD.
9. Develop a Data Collection system that tracks the work of NDSD and the outreach efforts.
10. Train all practitioners to become more proficient data collectors.
11. Develop a new school /outreach name.